Learning to Use Black

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

Alyscamps Press, Paris
Karl Orend, Publisher

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This edition is dedicated to the memory of dear, departed, friends – Patricia Pruitt, Jim Haynes, and David Turner.

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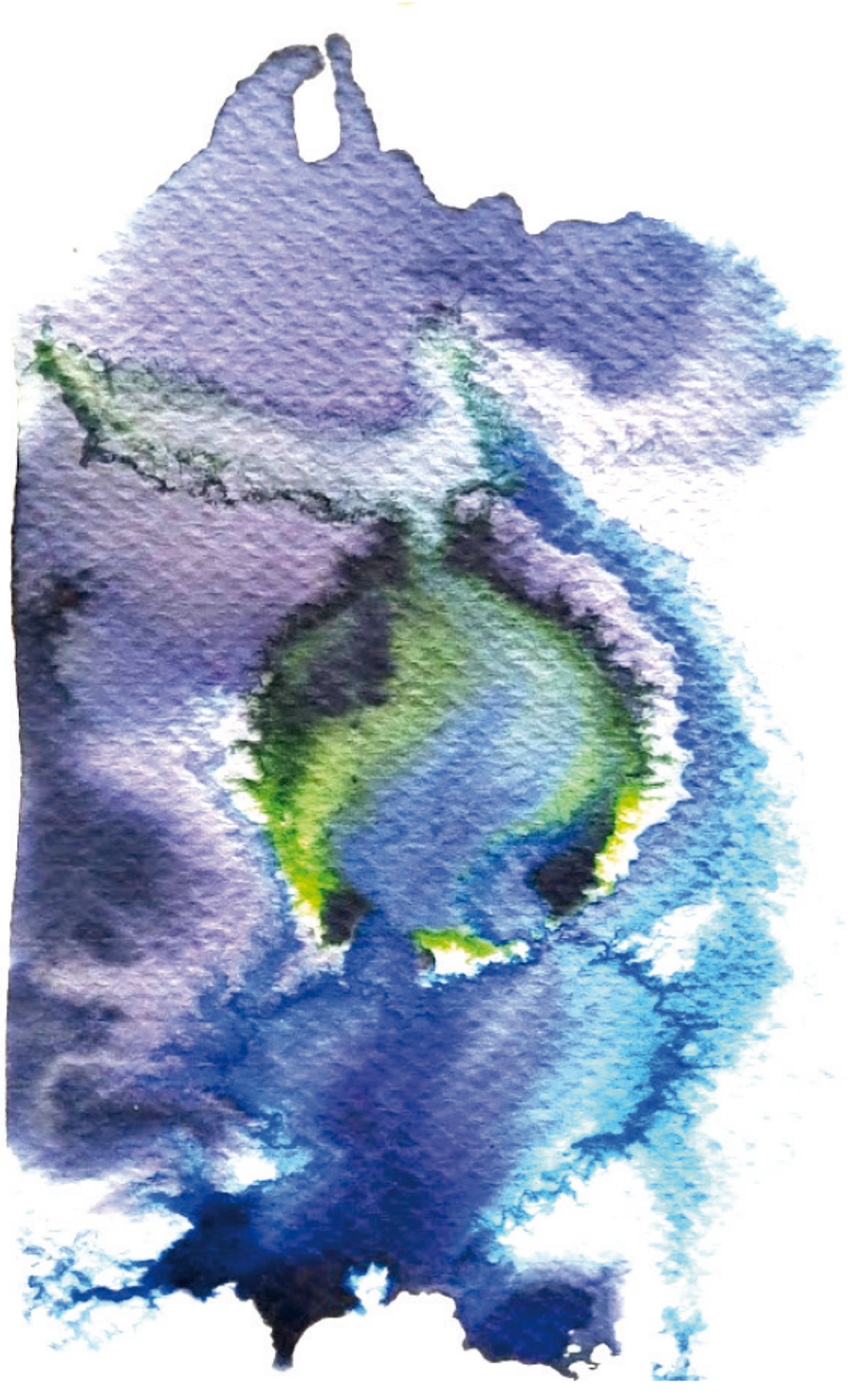

The rambling never-seen fuses
the revelation delivered by stars.
Implicit contradictions of simultaneities
in which even a casual imagery has its own logic,
the logic of the brush or the earth.

Violet cobweb fingers extend,
become a center.
The inclusive sense of rejection
creates an ejection:
a way of remaining.

Burns at dawn
the embers' night song.
Each measure a measure
of language outside speech.
Primary inked sensations free the fingers
to obtain what is inevitable.

On the periphery of gray
the blue tendrils cling.
Self-referencing also references the other,
reminds us of homecomings
of which we weren't even aware,
of happenings beyond easy understanding.

Paralyzed motion trapped and caged:
a weave or a web,
not entrapment but containment.
Old sensations become new
within their intimate layered boundaries.

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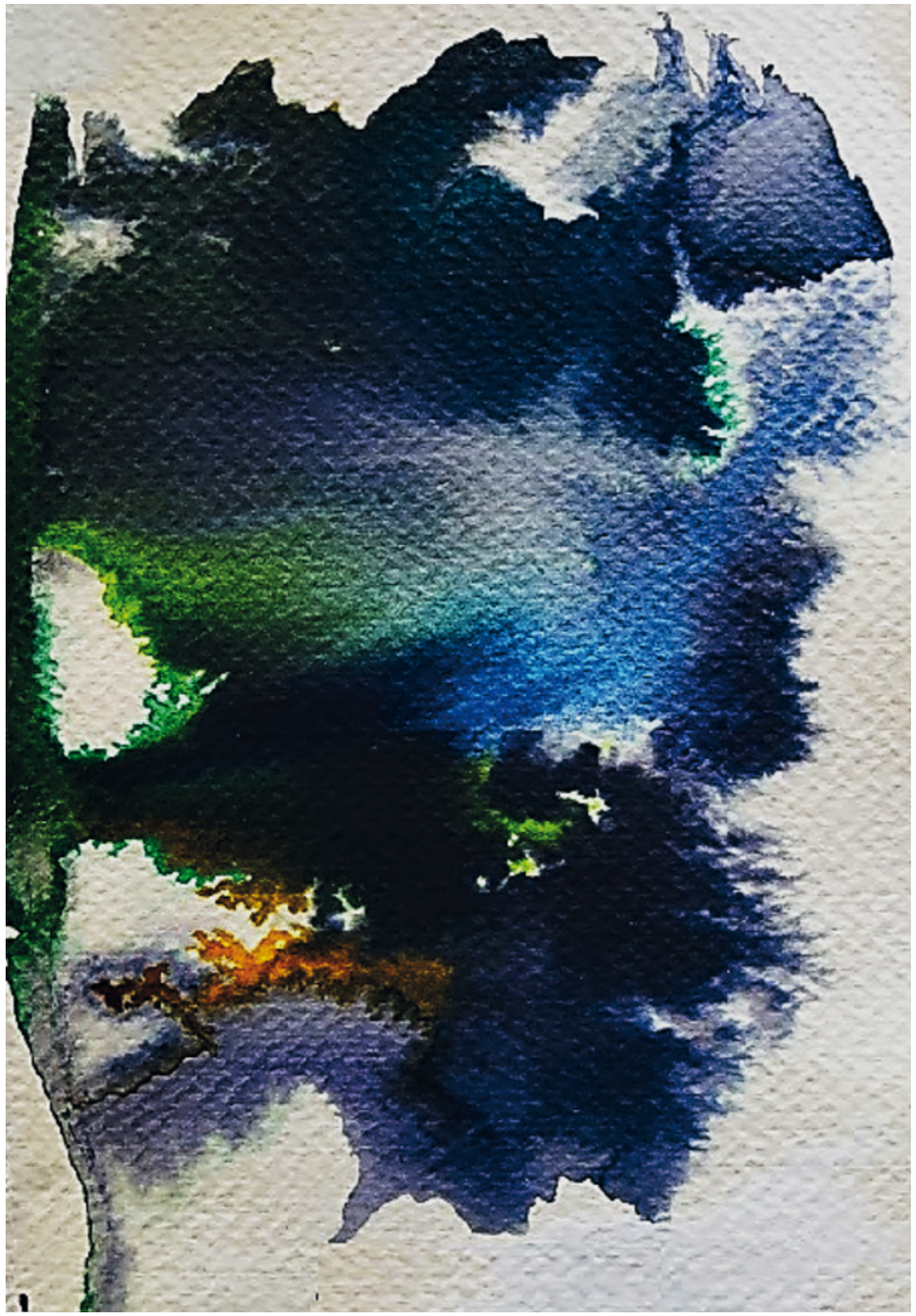
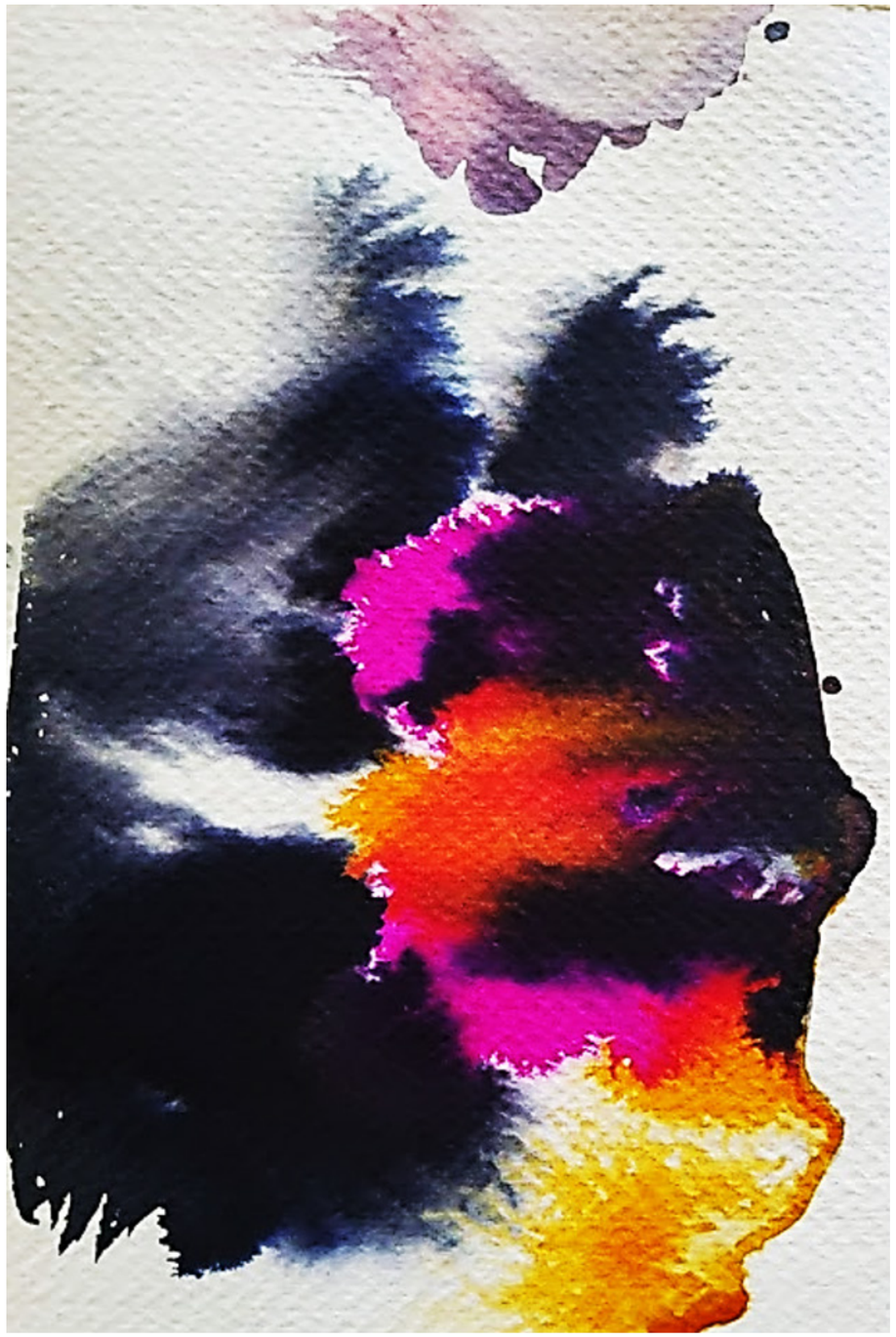


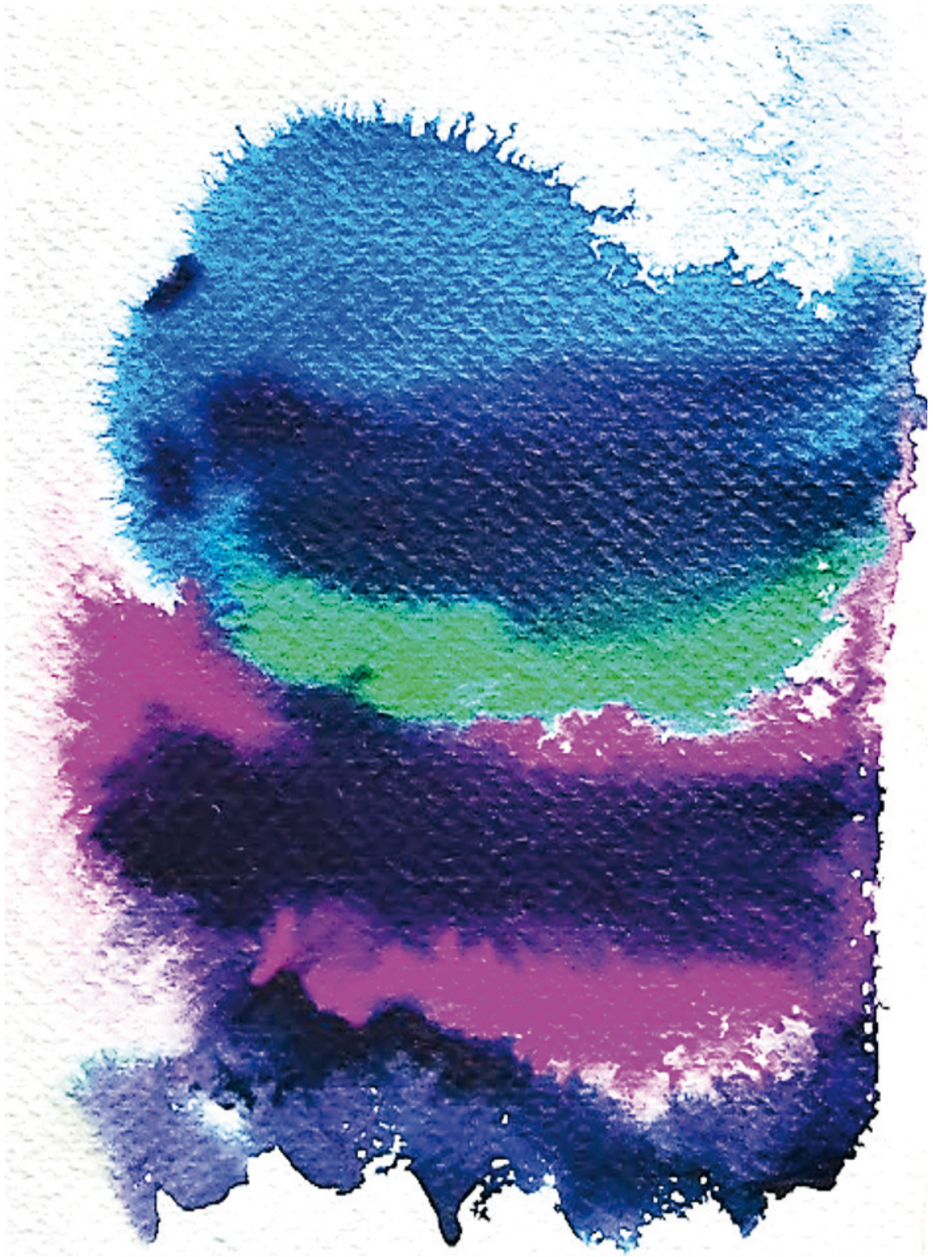
Beneath the shallows
the octopus black of deep water.

Invading forms stop at the edge,
bring calm.
Expressions expose intentions,
give way to a particular elation.
Advanced speculation arises
from an abandonment of accommodation.

Roaring landward,
the Titan waves
shatter on the rocks.
Nausithous and Nausinous
swim happily alongside Calypso.



A swarm of colored events
tangled and random:
bees seeking the moon.
Pluralities overcome singularities,
fly forth: invincible.



The drifting spectrum
grapples for discovery.
Twisting but not twisted,
satisfied with itself
just because.

The final embrace:
color and its contradiction.

Afterword

I first met Karl Orend in the summer of 1990 at Shakespeare & Company in Paris. At that time, he was the manager of the bookstore. At the invitation of George Whitman, I was the "Writer-in-Residence." Karl and I hit it off immediately and spent a great many hours discussing life and literature and Paris, a city we both loved. That fall, I was back in Paris, and my recollection is that Karl first mentioned to me then that he was thinking about starting a literary press. I remember being very supportive of the idea and encouraged him to go forward.

A year or so later, after my return to the States, I received a letter from Karl asking if I might be interested in sending him a manuscript for his new venture which he had christened Alyscamps Press, an homage of sorts to his beloved Provence. I sent him The World's Words. In 1992, it became his first publication. I was honored and exceedingly pleased that he had chosen my little book to inaugurate Alyscamps Press.

Karl went on to publish a great many very important books over many years, all exhibiting the highest production values. To date, he has issued over 160 books. Authors he has published have won six Nobel prizes, the European Translation Prize, Spanish National Literature Prize, Georg Büchner Prize, the Prix Goncourt, and a host of other awards. He has also steadfastly supported new and undervalued writers.

Then, as now, his regard for books of the highest quality both in terms of content and aesthetics, separated Alyscamps from most other small presses.
And he has done it all on his own, during good times and bad, without a single grant, all on his own franc or dime or euro. We have collaborated on more than two dozen publications – including translations of works by Rafael Alberti, Federico Garcia Lorca, Louis Aragon, Benjamin Péret, Man Ray, Paul Eluard and Max Ernst, as well as original books of poems.

As honored as I was over 28 years ago that Karl reached out to me for his first publication, I am even more honored now that he has chosen Learning to Use Black to celebrate 28 years of Alyscamps.

I owe much to Karl, as do so many, for his ardent dedication to book arts and to making texts old and new, in translation and in the original languages, come alive in his splendid editions. May Alyscamps continue for another 28 years!

--Christopher Sawyer- Lauçanno

I am indebted to Thoreau Lovell at Wet Cement Press in Berkeley, CA for initially suggesting this hybrid project to me where Learning to Use Black will appear next year in a different format.

Learning to Use Black

by

Christopher Sawyer-Lauçanno

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This is copy _____

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